"A RETRIEVED REFORMATION"

O. HENRY

Study Guide Questions

1. WHY IS VALENTINE IN PRISON? WHY IS HE PARDONED BY THE GOVERNOR?

- Convicted of "cracking safes"
- Governor grants Valentine clemency because he has "many friends on the outside"

2. WHEN OUT OF PRISON, HOW DOES VALENTINE SUPPORT HIMSELF?

- He resumes his life of crime as a safecracker

3. WHY DOES BEN START LOOKING FOR JIMMY AGAIN?

- He wants Jimmy Valentine to do his time
- From the pattern of the robberies, Ben deduces that it must be Valentine & Price sets out to bring Valentine to justice *(It's the "Right" thing to do)*

4. At what point in the story does Valentine become another man?

- When he looks into the banker's daughter's eyes. "Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgot what he was, and became another man."

5. WHAT CAUSES THE CHANGE?

- A "sudden and alterative attack of love."

(He found a new purpose in life)

6. WHY DOES VALENTINE USE HIS OLD TALENTS ONCE AGAIN?

- When his fiancé Annabel's niece is accidentally locked in the vault, Valentine risks his new way of life to free her.

7. Find three details in the story that support the idea that Valentine has really changed.

1. He abandons his plan to rob the bank in Elmore
2. He remains in town & opens a successful shoe store
3. Writes a letter to an old friend in which he admits to change & arranges to give away his burglary tools.

8. WHY DOES BEN PRETEND NOT TO KNOW JIMMY?

- Ben observes that Jimmy has changed his life—when Jimmy rescues the girl, Ben is convinced of the change & is willing to allow the *reformed criminal* to continue leading an honest life as Ralph D. Spencer.
- …It's the "right thing to do", in Ben's mind.

9. EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE STORY'S TITLE.

- In saving the girl, Valentine *throws* away his new identity as a reformed man. Ben Price *retrieves* that reformed identity by conspiring to keep Valentine's true identity a secret.
- (NOTE: You can only "retrieve" what has once been lost or given away.)

10. If you were Ben Price, what would you have done when you confronted Jimmy after he let the girl out of the safe?

DEFINE **SURPRISE ENDING**

- Definition:

Why is *this* story's ending considered a "surprise"?

Because Jimmy is never formally accused of the crimes he committed since his release from prison *(Heck, he barely even served his punishment from when he WAS arrested)*

HOW DID YOU THINK THE STORY WOULD END?

WHAT CLUES LED YOU TO EXPECT THIS ENDING?

- The title suggested someone had to go through a "reformation"
- Suspense or intrigue may have enhanced in the reader when we met Annabel
- O. Henry is known for having "ironic" endings
- **Suspicion/Anticipation may have increased when Mr. Adams went on to show Jimmy his new vault.** *(Dramatic irony= the readers know something that the characters do not. Irony= the opposite of what you'd expect occurs; a bank owner is willingly opening his vault to a safecracker!!)*

CHARACTER TYPES

"A Retrieved Reformation" O.Henry

JIMMY VALENTINE
CHARACTER TYPE(S)?

- **ROUND-**--because we see different personality traits: comes across charismatic and amicable, yet lives this "double life" as a sneaky, devious thief.
- Also **Dynamic**--because he is a devious "safecracker" but then reforms to an honest citizen in the form of Ralph—"the phoenix that arose from Jimmy's ashes"

RALPH SPENCER
CHARACTER TYPE(S)?

- **DYNAMIC**—because when he first refers to himself as "Ralph", he's doing so to hide his identity; he has intentions to continue his life as a thief under the ploy of a "businessman" but shortly thereafter, he makes a complete transformation to "Ralph Spencer" when he meets Annabel.

BEN PRICE

CHARACTER TYPE(S)?

- **<u>STATIC</u>**—b/c he stays in the same in that he "always does the right (good) thing" which includes letting Ralph go in the end
- Also **Flat**—b/c for most of the story, we are introduced to limited traits of Ben—the one-dimensional "detective" type.

ANNABEL
CHARACTER TYPE(S)?

- **<u>FLAT</u>**—because we are given a limited view of her; only seen as beautiful girl who Valentine/Spencer falls in love with.
- Also **static** because she doesn't seem to change.

ANNABEL'S FATHER
CHARACTER TYPE(S)?

- **<u>FLAT</u>**—because we only see him as a banker/loving father—not much else.)Also static because she doesn't seem to change.
- Also **static** b/c he doesn't change after the "big event" that occurs in his life [his daughter's engagement]

SO WHAT'S WITH THE ROSE?

READ IT AGAIN CAREFULLY…

He looked at her with a ***queer, soft smile*** on his lips and in his ***keen eyes***.

"Annabel," he said, "give me that rose you are wearing, will you?"

He gets the idea

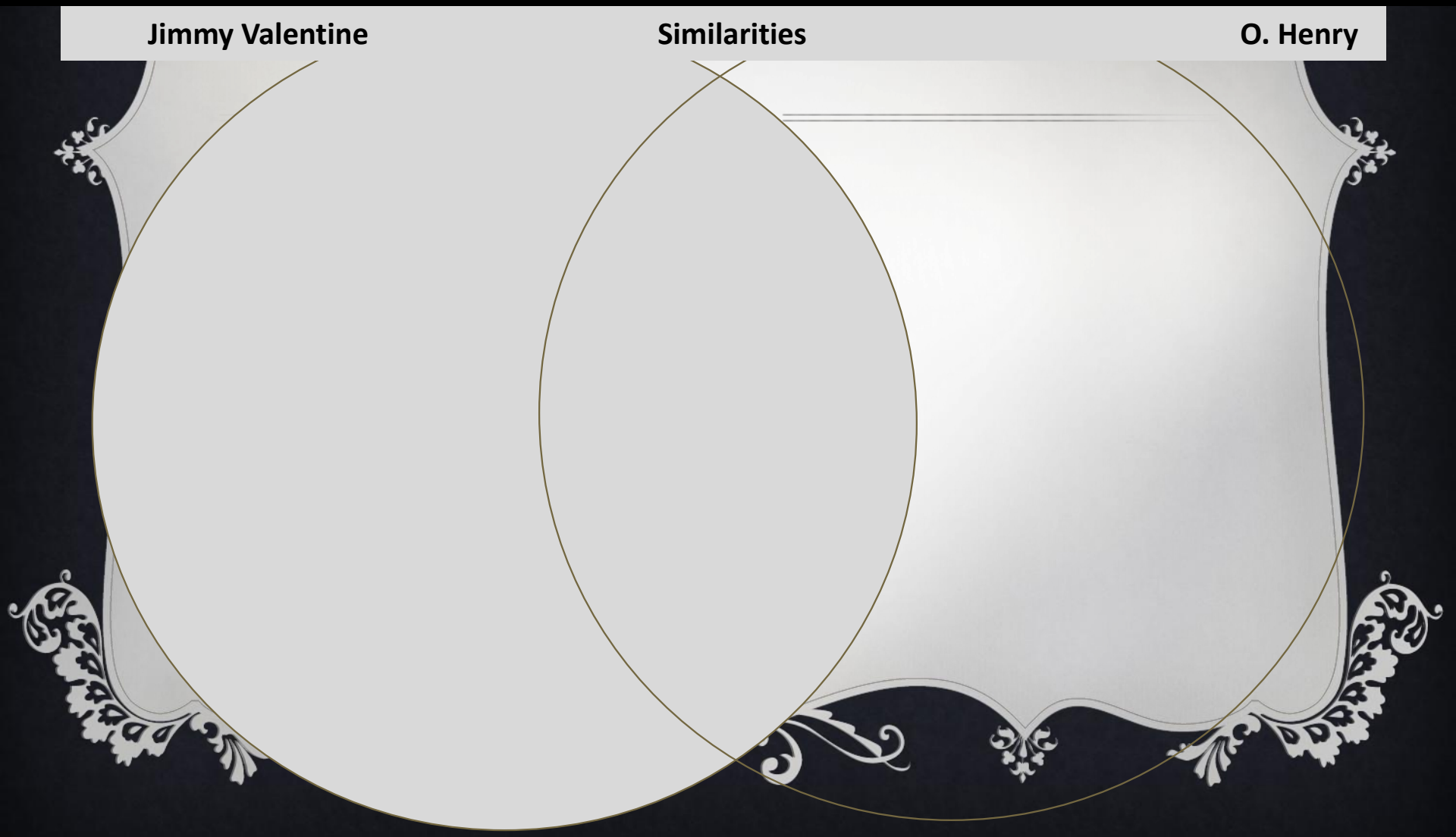
Hardly believing that she heard him aright, she unpinned the bud from the bosom of her dress, and placed it in his hand. Jimmy stuffed it into his vest-pocket, threw off his coat and ***pulled up his shirt-sleeves***. With that act Ralph D. Spencer **passed away** and Jimmy Valentine took his place.

He "crosses the line"

AKA: The "Field of Dreams" effect

“RALPH” ASKS FOR THE ROSE BECAUSE HE KNOWS HE’S RETURNING TO JIMMY… JUST LIKE DOC IN “FIELD OF DREAMS”

Complete the following Venn diagram with <u>at least</u> <u>three details</u> in each of the three areas. Refer to your Background notes, book and/or study guide as needed.



STORY MAP

"A Retrieved Reformation" O.Henry

SETTING

- Early 1900s
- Elmore, Arkansas
- Begins in prison
- Some banks

MOOD

- **Hopeful**
  - Can people really change? O. Henry wanted to believe they (he) could—readers are intended to feel the same.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Jimmy Valentine
- (Ralph Spencer)

MINOR CHARACTERS

- Ben Price
- Annabel
- Annabel's father

CONFLICT

- **Man vs. Man (**Ben Price & vulnerable banks vs. Jimmy Valentine)
- **Man vs. Self** (Jimmy Valentine vs. Ralph Spencer and his decision to reveal his true identity, risking his love and new life)

Safecracker Jimmy Valentine (who is trying to disguise himself as Ralph Spencer, an honest shoe salesman) has to decide to reveal knowledge from his past lifestyle (cracking safes) in order to save his love's young niece. This would risk exposure, getting caught and going back to jail.

RESOLUTION

- Ralph reverts back to "Jimmy" to open the safe and saves Annabel's niece.
- Ben Price recognizes Jimmy but decides to let him go without punishment for his past crimes so that Jimmy can continue living his "reformed life" as Ralph Spencer. Ben chooses not to reveal Jimmy's true identity.

THEME

- **"No matter what you have done in your past, you can start over. Sometimes you have to do the right thing, even if it means possibly losing everything"**

POINT OF VIEW

- Third person limited (mainly focused on Jimmy/Ralph, but it's not Jimmy/Ralph telling the story)

INTRODUCTION

- Jimmy is pardoned from prison
- He's given a railroad ticket, and a $5 bill to "rehabilitate" himself. The warden gives him a cigar too.

RISING ACTION

- After prison, he goes back to robbing banks again
- Goes to Elmore/ sees Annabell
- Signs name as Ralph D. Spencer
- Owns shoe store
- Gets married
- Writes letter to friend saying he plans on giving away his tools; done with "that life"
- Mr. Adams shows Jimmy his bank's new vault

CLIMAX

- Agatha gets locked in the new vault (safe)
- Jimmy makes a choice (crosses the proverbial *field of dreams* "line")

FALLING ACTION

- Jimmy opens the safe, revealing his skill-set as a safecracker
  - Risks his future with Annabel

CONCLUSION

- Ben Price acts like he doesn't know Jimmy; doesn't arrest him.

VOCABULARY

Do you remember what these words mean?

RETRIEVED

- *My dog retrieved the ball after I threw it.

REFORMATION

- Many people believe that a **reformation** would make our country's government better.

ASSIDUOUSLY

- *The detective hunted assiduously for clues.

EMINENT

- The musician was eminent after their first number one hit debuted on the radio.

RETRIBUTION

- My retribution for not doing my homework was a detention.

SPECIOUS

- *Some court cases are specious because the lawyer twists the facts.

GUILE

- *A police officer needs guile when interrogating a difficult criminal.

ALTERATIVE

- Dynamic characters usually are part of an alterative event that causes them to make a realization and change their ways.

UNOBTRUSIVELY

❖She unobtrusively finished her homework in the back of the classroom before the teacher came to her desk.